US·VISIT
Keeping America's Doors Open and Our Nation Secure

Homeland Security

Press Release

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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY TO BEGIN BIOMETRIC EXIT PILOT AS PART OF US-VISIT PROGRAM

(Washington, DC) August 3, 2004- As a part of the border management system introduced at airports and seaports earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today announced that it will pilot and evaluate US-VISIT automated biometric exit procedures for foreign visitors.

The exit pilot program will be expanded from its current locations – Baltimore-Washington International Airport and Miami's International Cruise Line Terminal – to Chicago O'Hare International Airport beginning in August 2004 and will be piloted at the following airports and seaports in September 2004:

> Atlanta, Georgia (William B. Hartsfield International Airport)
> Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas (Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport)
> Denver, Colorado (Denver International Airport)
> Detroit, Michigan (Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport)
> Newark, New Jersey (Newark International Airport)
> Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia International Airport)
> Phoenix, Arizona (Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport)
> San Francisco, California (San Francisco International Airport)
> San Juan, Puerto Rico (Luis Muñoz Marin International Airport)
> Seattle, Washington (Seattle/Tacoma International Airport)
> Los Angeles, California (San Pedro and Long Beach Seaports)

Any foreign visitor with a visa who leaves the United States through one of the pilot sites is required to comply. After September 30, 2004, visitors traveling under the Visa Waiver Program will be required to comply as well.

"We will begin testing processes that will make exit quick for visitors and effective for security," said Asa Hutchinson, Under Secretary for Border and Transportation Security at the Department of Homeland Security. "We must implement a straightforward exit process to ensure that individuals adhere to the terms of their admission. This supports our efforts to strengthen homeland security and ensure integrity of our immigration system."

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As this is a pilot program beginning in September 2004, US-VISIT will analyze the benefits and challenges of each exit process in order to develop a system that enhances security while facilitating legitimate travel and ensuring travelers' privacy.

The exit procedures being piloted require foreign visitors to check out at an automated exit station or with a US-VISIT exit attendant at the departure gate at the port. Foreign visitors will go though one of the following two processes, depending on location.

- Under one alternative, visitors departing the United States will check out of the country at exit stations located within the airport or seaport terminal. As with the process the visitors encounter upon entry at airports or seaports, their travel documents are read, their two index fingers will be scanned at the exit station, their digital picture will be taken, and they will receive a printed receipt that verifies that they have checked out. An exit workstation attendant will be available to assist with visitors' check out. Visitors also may be required to present the receipt at their departure gate to confirm that they checked out at the exit station.

- Another alternative under the pilot program is a biometric check-out process with a US-VISIT exit attendant at visitors' departure gates.

To help the process run smoothly, foreign visitors will receive a printed card explaining the exit process from Customs and Border Protection when they arrive in the United States. Also, directional signs are strategically located throughout the airports and seaports.

US-VISIT is a continuum of security measures that begins overseas and continues on through entry and exit at U.S. airports and seaports and, eventually, at land border crossings. The US-VISIT program enhances the security of U.S. citizens and visitors by matching the identity of visitors with their travel documents. At the same time, it facilitates legitimate travel and trade by leveraging technology and the evolving use of biometrics to expedite processing at our borders.

The first phase of US-VISIT launched on January 5, 2004, when DHS deployed the new biometric entry capabilities at 115 airports and 14 seaports and began testing a biometric departure confirmation system at two locations. Since then, millions of foreign visitors have been processed without impacting wait times and it is working. US-VISIT has helped to prevent hundreds of criminals and immigration violators from entering the country. Before the biometric component of US-VISIT, these people might have gotten through our system and into our country.

Biometric technology – digital finger scans and digital photographs – helps make US-VISIT clean, simple, and effective. In fact, the use of biometrics for identification is fast becoming the standard, and much of the world is following the trend.

US-VISIT is helping us demonstrate that we remain a welcoming nation and that we can keep America's doors open and our nation secure. For more information on US-VISIT, or to le arn more about the new exit procedures, please visit the US-VISIT Web site at www.dhs.gov/us-visit.

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